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ABSTRACT

To meet the changing needs of its young people, Atlanta Public Schools searched for an organizational structure that would (1) permit more flexibility and individualization of instruction; (2) allow pupils to take one course, two courses, or a combination of courses and activities; (3) permit a wider selection of options; and (4) expand the school year and permit the interchange of its various parts. Eight school systems in the metropolitan Atlanta area, in conjunction with the State Department of Education, worked cooperatively to develop such a plan. Each of the school systems independently and cooperatively organized and worked to develop an appropriate curriculum, and the four-quarter plan was adopted for the new curriculum and program. Collectively, the systems produced a nonsequential, nongraded individualized program with courses developed according to behavioral objectives, student characteristics, and administrative requirements. This document describes the program and lists some of its advantages and disadvantages. (Author/MLF)

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ATLANTA PUBLIC SCHOOLS

ATLANTA, GEORGIA

THE FOUR QUARTER SCHOOL YEAR

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EA 004 202

WIDENING CURRICULUM OPTIONS

Atlanta is a vast, complex, changing city. The changes of recent years have been dramatic. No longer is life dominated by an agrarian society. Animal power has been replaced by machinery. Modern technology demands skills unheard of in previous years. People are more mobile. New and different jobs are available.

The challenge of education has always been to provide programs which meet the needs of the time. However, the changes in education have not always kept pace with the changes in society as a whole. Too often educational changes have occurred as a reaction to the times rather than a response. Therefore, the major question faced by the Atlanta Public Schools in this period of complex and constant change is

What type of educational programs should be provided?

In response to this question, we found we had to ask ourselves two other pertinent questions:

...What are Atlanta's needs?

...What is a possible and positive approach to meeting these needs?

WHAT ARE ATLANTA'S NEEDS?

There is no simple answer to this question, for Atlanta is far from a simple city. It is a big, bustling, growing city:

...27th in population in the United States.

...3rd in air travel.

...9th in residential buildings.

...3rd in non farm employment.

The homes for its residents range from modern high rise apartments to old frame structures, from decaying parts of the inner city to townhouses, from low socio economic areas to large estates, from slums to subdivisions.

What are Atlanta's needs? How do the people who live in these various kinds of housing earn a living in 1972? They are dental technicians, lawyers, construction workers, service station operators, airline reservation clerks, architects, executives, clerks, judges, secretaries, inmates, and welfare recipients.

What are Atlanta's needs? Educational programs which will equip the young people of today to live in this complex, changing city. Educational programs which will provide for individual needs and individual aspirations.

Traditionally, the school program was pretty much of single design similar to a funnel. Regardless of the size, shape, desires, aptitudes, and goals of the pupils, courses were presented and required in sequential order—pupils passed or repeated before moving on. Pupils were grouped rigidly and scheduled by grades regardless of their learning abilities and potentials. This constraint did not seem appropriate; neither did it seem to be educationally meaningful.

HOW WAS THE PROBLEM APPROACHED?

We were faced with finding a pattern of organizational structure which would carry a flexible, changing curriculum and would allow for individual goals of pupils. We had tried the semester system. We also tried the "souped up" semester system. We examined the trimester. However, we were searching for an organizational structure which would permit more flexibility and individualization of instruction; one which would allow pupils to take **one course**, or two courses, or a combination of courses and activities; one which would permit a wider selection of options; and one which would expand the school year and permit the interchange of its various parts. Therefore, representatives from the eight school systems in the metropolitan Atlanta area, in conjunction with the State Department of Education, worked cooperatively to develop such a plan. We actually went into this program on a cooperative basis because of the size. These eight school systems enroll more than one-third the students in Georgia. Cooperation gave us a psychological security and mutual support.

Area superintendents, state department representatives, department chairmen, and other key instructional leaders were added to the planning group. The decision was reached that the vehicle needed to carry the curriculum should have four interchangeable parts. The structure took shape; the four-quarter plan was the structure we would use as a vehicle for our new curriculum and program. Merely to "chop" the traditional courses into quarter blocks would not give the flexibility desired. So, each of the eight school systems, in varying degrees, independently and cooperatively organized and worked to develop an appropriate curriculum.

Atlanta's staff composed of teachers, coordinators, subject area department heads, librarians, consultants, administrators, and, on occasion, students examined the curriculum by

subject areas. Each subject area committee exchanged ideas with similar committees in the other metropolitan school systems, and interdisciplinary groups worked together. Administrative committees were also at work. **Collectively, we produced a non-sequential, non-graded individualized program.** In order to accomplish this goal, the entire high school curriculum was rewritten by identifying **feasible** concepts in each discipline, grouping those which seemed to hang together, and arranging them in courses. When possible, the courses were developed according to behavioral objectives, student characteristics, and administrative requirements as we perceived them at that time.

In order to give some uniformity in course development, this guide was devised and used by each subject area committee.

RECOMMENDED QUARTER COURSE
SUBJECT AREA OF _____

Name of Course and Description	Student Characteristics	Behavioral Objectives	Administrative Requirements
(Catalogue title and a one or two sentence description)	(Who will take the course? Age, achievement level, pre-requisite courses, vocational goals, academic goals, others)	(What the pupils are expected to accomplish in this course)	(Double periods, time of day, size of class, physical facility required, etc.)

You will note we were concerned about behavioral objectives. These were the days when behavioral objectives were just beginning to become popular, and perhaps we did not reach our desired goals in every case. However, for the first time, on a comprehensive basis, we were concerned about what it was that students were **to learn**, to learn to do, to develop their attitudes, or specifically what we were trying to accomplish. This behavioral approach is quite different from saying that the purpose of this course is to prepare people to live successfully in American democracy—whatever that means. We were much more specific. Furthermore, we turned our attention to the more individual characteristics of students:

...learning styles

...goals

...ambitions.

We were concerned about developing courses which would make possible the reaching of behavioral objectives by students of many and varied individual characteristics.

We were also concerned about administrative regulations. We had previously had the experience of developing courses only to have them rebuffed because of inadequate space or restraining needs such as a wall removed. Therefore, we wanted to know before we began our

new course building what kinds of administrative requirements would be necessary to implement a particular course. The constant and meaningful involvement of administrators made this goal possible.

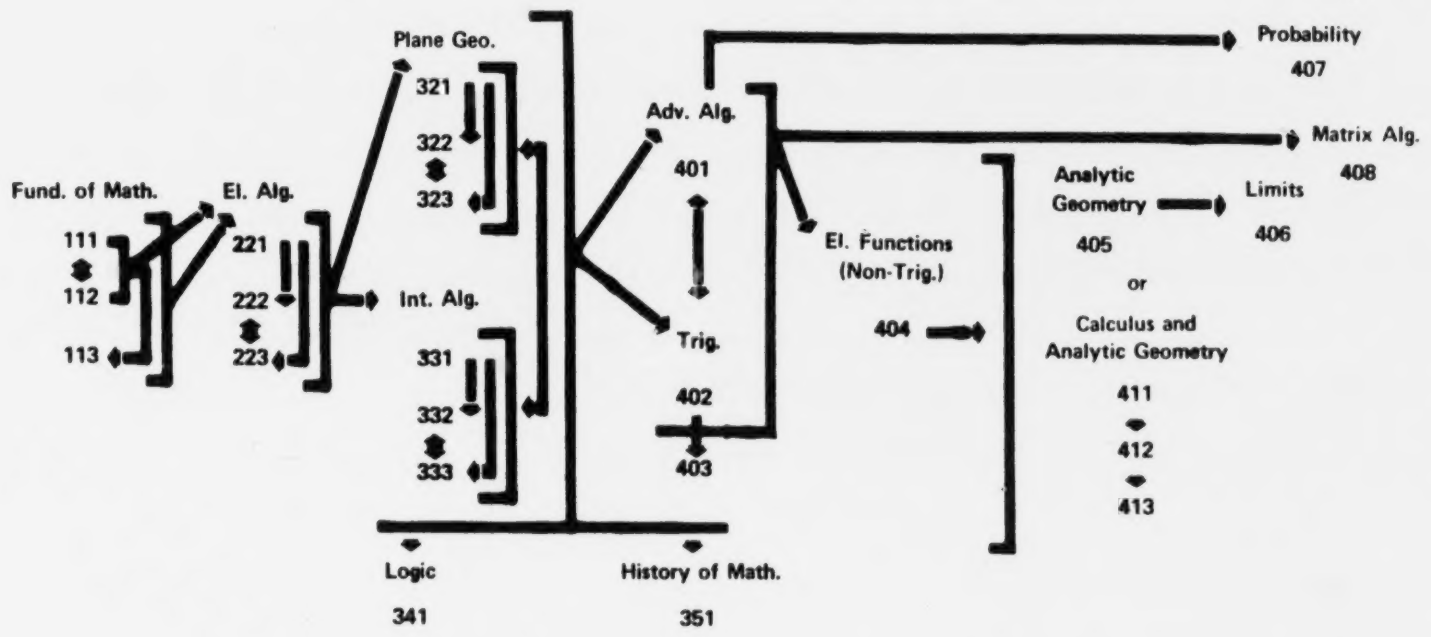
For each course, we developed a teacher's guide—**a mass undertaking.** During one summer alone—the first summer we really got underway—we used more than eighteen tons of paper cut in 8½ x 11 size for printing the guides. When we tallied the number of courses we found that we had developed over 850, a number which has now grown to 870. Each course was listed and described in a catalogue which was distributed to each high school. Obviously, no one school could offer all of these courses during any one quarter, nor would some of the courses necessarily ever be offered in some schools. The selection of courses for any one school is determined by the composition of the student body.

WHAT IS THE NEW CURRICULUM LIKE?

It is non-sequential, non-graded, individualized.

The majority of the courses are non-sequential. This is a problem that we had to solve early in the planning. We found, to the dismay of some and to the satisfaction of others, that courses did not necessarily have to be provided in sequential order.

FLOW CHART OF THE ACADEMIC PROGRAM IN MATHEMATICS



NOTE: A pupil may move from the Academic Program to the Basic Program at any quarter.

Math 111 and 112 can be taken in any order as long as the context is reasonably mastered in both before you take 113. As long as the content in these three courses is mastered, a pupil might branch off in any direction, in any math courses offered in the school system. His **own** desires and his goals will dictate into which course he goes and in which order he chooses his path.

It provides for flexible scheduling.

Another important feature is flexible scheduling. The new curriculum provides for the different levels and abilities of the students through more flexible scheduling.

PUPIL'S SCHEDULE - COLLEGE PREPARATORY			
Fall - 1968	Winter - 1968	Spring - 1969	Summer - 1969
Nature of Civilization (S.S.)	Dev. of Nation-State (S.S.)	Political Behavior (S.S.)	Typing
Inter. French A	Inter. French B	Inter. French C	Theater (Eng.)
P. E.: Tennis	P. E.: Soccer	P. E.: Track and Field	Short Story
BSCS Biology	BSCS Biology	BSCS Biology	Dev. of U. S. Democracy
Adventuring in Lit. I	Composition (Eng.)	Adventuring in Lit. II	
Plane Geometry	Plane Geometry	Plane Geometry	

This is a schedule for a pupil who wishes to go to college. Although it is entitled college preparatory, we have no such program designated, but from the 870 courses and proper professional assistance from counselors, teachers, and parents, we can assist the pupil in selecting the kind of courses he will need to enter practically any university anywhere. This particular student wanted to go to college - is now in college and is doing quite well. A careful examination of the courses selected will reveal the fact that this is a traditional college prep type program.

Another program for a student who needed two quarter courses in English and in social studies to complete requirements for graduation wished also to take choir or music and to be of assistance around the school, thus completing one-half day.

ACTUAL SENIOR STUDENT SCHEDULE	
1st Quarter	2nd Quarter
1. Composition (Eng.)	1. Composition (Eng.)
2. Choir	2. Honor Choir
3. Aide (Principal)	3. Aide (Assistant Principal)
4. Comparative Cultures (S.S.)	4. International Relations (S.S.)
Early dismissal	Early dismissal
—at work by 1:00 P. M.	—at work by 1:00 P. M.

At noon the student was dismissed and worked as a mail clerk in a nearby establishment. This young man is also in college and is doing quite well, illustrating again the fact that a student who wishes or needs to work would not be prevented from going to college.

Other types of flexibility in terms of students with different abilities and having different needs was also considered important. English is probably an example that illustrates as well as any the wide range of abilities of students in a common core type subject. In Atlanta we have high school students who are reading below the fourth grade level, between fourth and sixth, and above the sixth grade level. Some appropriate courses for each one of them are listed next, including courses for those who are just beginning to read and are improving below the fourth grade level. Would it be better for a non-reader, 16- years old, to learn to read than it would be for him to flunk Shakespeare again? We decided in favor of teaching students things that were meaningful to them regardless of whether it was on the first grade, twelfth grade, or college level.

A. READING LEVEL BELOW 4.0	
LOWER DIVISION:	UPPER DIVISION:
Reading Improvement I, II	Expository Composition
Communication Skills Lab. I, II	Readings for Modern Man
Literary Modes	Adventuring through Literature I
Language Skills	Drama for Modern Man
Mass Media	Theatre and Stagecraft
	Short Story

B. READING LEVEL FROM 4.0 - 5.9	
LOWER DIVISION	UPPER DIVISION:
CSL I, II, III	Expository Composition
Literary Modes	Adventuring through Literature II
Language Skills	Oral Language
Mass Media	Poetry
	American Literature I
	Communication: The Paragraph
POSSIBLE SUMMER QUARTER ELECTIVES: Theatre and Stagecraft	

C. READING LEVEL 6.0 OR ABOVE	
LOWER DIVISION:	UPPER DIVISION:
Literary Themes	Adventuring through Literature II
Communication: Sentence Patterns	Composition
Myths and Legends	American Literature I
Mass Media	Language Development
Communication: The Paragraph	American Literature II
Literary Types	Drama
POSSIBLE SUMMER QUARTER ELECTIVES: Creative Writing Shakespeare The Novel	

It requires more counseling with students.

To have this much flexibility is one thing, but to be able to counsel with students in the way the flexibility demands is very important. The classroom teacher's role in counseling has been greatly enhanced because she works closer with the pupils and, above all others, is better able to suggest appropriate courses to take next in any given subject area. Hopefully, through this process, each pupil will be scheduled so that he will be challenged enough to maintain interest but not enough to find course work too demanding and thus lose interest. Through this total counseling and selection process, courses are selected for each pupil for each quarter. Each pupil examines his program of studies, and the courses selected for the quarter are noted. During the quarter, the pupil's records are reviewed, and with further counseling—with a guidance counselor if the case warrants it—a second quarter's program of studies is identified and added. As was illustrated previously, work may be scheduled for one-half day, during the morning or afternoon or it could come at some other time. The whole idea is that there is a flexibility or a possibility of flexibility depending upon the pupil's respective needs and his own direction.

To facilitate scheduling, we do use the computer. There is some question about whether it is mandatory or not in order to have a successful program, and there is still some real question about whether we can schedule faster or more effectively manually. The question of rapidly retrievable forms of data is clearly answered by the computer assisting us in that particular area. Following the same counseling procedure, the third quarter's program of studies is identified, as is the fourth quarter, and any subsequent quarters of work that the pupil may wish to take.

This whole process of scheduling re-emphasizes the fact that Atlanta's pupils come in different sizes and shapes and that the old uniform curriculum design does not fit the majority of our pupils. The four-quarter plan provides **wider options** and, with proper counseling, better suits our pupils.

It credits students for work completed in a different fashion.

After several months of debate, we decided that if the courses were properly selected in terms of the activity that the student would need next in order to continue his normal growth pattern and if he were pursuing these reasonably well and making progress, every course would have exactly the same amount of credit. That is, if he attends class one hour a day, five days a week for a quarter and passes, he would earn five quarter hours regardless of

the name of the course. Although we do not record Carnegie units or keep up with them in any way, the rule of fifteen quarter hours equals one carnegie unit is used for handling transfer students.

WHAT HAS REALLY HAPPENED TO THE ATLANTA PUBLIC SCHOOLS AS A RESULT OF THIS EFFORT TO WIDEN CURRICULUM OPTIONS?

Many questions have been answered and many others identified.

After more than two years of preparation, the four-quarter plan began in September of 1968, and is now in its fourteenth quarter of operation. During this period of time, we have answered many questions, but we have, in the process, probably identified more questions than we have answered. One of the more commonly asked questions, particularly in the earlier years, was—**does it save money?** The answer for Atlanta's program is simply no. It was not designed as a money saving approach; it was designed as a vehicle for curriculum revision—a method for providing more relevant courses and more meaningful experiences for the youth enrolled in the school system. Since all youth have an opportunity to come either three or four quarters if they wish, the cost of operating the additional quarter is over and above what it would cost if we stopped at the end of the third quarter.

How did you get people involved?

We worked at public involvement some two or more years prior to implementing the program, and we developed publications which we distributed widely to PTA's, news media, television programs, radio, school bulletins. We appeared before all kinds of groups to talk. We encouraged pupils to discuss their specific courses of study with their parents. Parents were invited to talk with teachers if they had any questions about what might happen. Faculty meetings were devoted to developing better understanding among staff members. Through this all, we found out that the public generally was much more in favor of moving into this type of program than some of us who call ourselves professional educators.

What major differences have you experienced since going into the year-round program?

One of the differences is that we have all of our high schools open all year long, full-day, tuition-free. Formerly, we had only a select number open in various specific locations in the summer. The enrollment has changed considerably, too. Prior to going on the year-round program, we had approximately 25% of the high school student body enrolled in one or more courses during the summer for which they paid tuition. In 1969, the first full summer of

operation on the year-round program, we had some 39% of the students to enroll with an average enrollment of 2.6 classes. The next summer, we dropped to 35%, but the number of classes increased to 3.6 on an average per student. In 1971, the enrollment percentage was 36; the course enrollment was 3.7, approaching the average load of 4.

What about eligibility for athletics?

Are you permitting your students to stay out the quarter they participate thus in essence becoming a pro? No. We appeared before the Association that sets the regulations, and it was ruled that a student would earn eligibility the quarter prior to this participation in a competitive sport, i.e., he would either earn his eligibility in the spring or the summer quarter prior to participating in the fall depending on his enrollment time. He must pass fifteen quarter hours during the quarter he earns eligibility and must be enrolled during the quarter he participates. The Atlanta School System has increased the requirement from fifteen to twenty quarter hours.

Have more special programs been added?

In addition to the regular full program, we have been able to maintain special activities and to increase the offerings of special activities because of our flexibility. One such program is called Upstream—the Atlanta School System's version of the internationally known program Outward Bound. For this program, youngsters enroll for 21 consecutive days in the North Georgia mountains. Fifteen quarter hours of credit—five hours in sociology, five hours in environmental biology, and five hours in physical education—are allowed for the experience. Qualified, certified teachers stay right with the students at all times. Other such special courses or programs include environmental biology, oceanography, automobile mechanics . . . Not only do these special programs enrich the curriculum offerings, but also some courses such as the automobile mechanics succeed in destroying many of the myths about those who work with their hands having less intellect.

HAS THE PROGRAM WORKED?

The curriculum has changed. It is more up-to-date, relevant, and flexible. The student and parent response has been positive. Perhaps some illustrative student comments will give an idea of the reception:

> ...Going to school all four quarters, I don't get behind and yet I can hold down a part-time job.

...By taking three or four courses a quarter, I don't feel pushed. We schedule what we feel I can handle without getting upset or nervous.

...One quarter, I took three social science courses—not to get rid of the hard work but to concentrate in one field.

...I just go whenever my mom makes me.

...Even physical education is different; we went to the public swimming pool three times a week for lessons.

...I'm on the annual staff so I went the fourth quarter to lighten my load all year and give me more time for the yearbook.

Few students, less than 100, take vacation quarters other than summer. Few choose to graduate early. Close to 6,000 will work—either as a part of a school program or on their own—part-time.

Does the new approach help? We think so. We know it widens the opportunities; we work constantly toward keeping it relevant and flexible.

February, 1972